

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 00256 151839Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0256

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SUBJ: CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

REF: PANAMA 220

SUMMARY. TORRIJOS IN TV INTERVIEW ACKNOWLEDGED THE EXISTENCE OF A TENTATIVE U.S.-PANAMANIAN AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES GOVERNING A NEW "NON-COLONIALIST" CANAL TREATY. GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS HAS TREATED PRESS REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES IN SUBDUED MANNER CALCULATED TO SUSTAIN MODERATE OPTIMISM WHILE CURBING EXCESSIVE EXPECTATIONS OF RAPID CONCLUSION OF A NEW TREATY. REPEATED FAVORABLE REFERENCE IN PRESS COMMENTARIES TO FACT THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER TRAVELLED TO PANAMA TWICE UNDERLINES THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMBOLIC ACTIONS WHICH SHOW RESPECT FOR PANAMANIAN NATIONAL DIGNITY. U.S. ACTIONS WHICH DEMONSTRATE RESPECT AND WILLINGNESS DEAL WITH PANAMA AS A SOVEREIGN NATION CAN HELP CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH GIVE AND TAKE COMPROMISE BECOMES POSSIBLE FOR PANAMANIAN LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL TORRIJOS,* DURING AN INTERVIEW WITH TV COMMENTATOR MARIO VELASQUEZ ON JANUARY 11, REPORTEDLY SAID THAT PANAMA AND THE UNITED STATES HAD "REACHED AN EIGHT-POINT AGREEMENT THAT EMBODIES AN UNDERSTANDING TO DRAFT A NEW NON-COLONIALIST PANAMA CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PANAMA 00256 151839Z

CANAL TREATY." HE SAID THE AGREEMENT WAS TENTATIVE AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONSULTING WITH REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS OF THE

PUBLIC, INCLUDING STUDENTS. AT THE END OF THE PERIOD OF CONSULTATION THE GOP WOULD "ACCEPT, AMEND OR REJECT THE AGREEMENT."

2. TORRIJOS EVADED GIVING A DIRECT ANSWER TO A QUESTION WHETHER SECRETARY KISSINGER WOULD COME TO PANAMA BY SAYING THAT AIR FORCE TWO COULD LAND AT TOCUMEN AT ANY MOMENT, BECAUSE THIS AIRPLANE ONLY LANDS IN AREAS OF CONFLICT OR POSSIBLE CONFLICT.

3. CONCERNING THE NEGOTIATIONS TORRIJOS SAID, "IN RECENT TIMES, WE HAVE ADVANCED MORE TOWARD A SOLUTION THAN AT ANY TIME IN THE 70 YEARS OF CANAL EXISTENCE." ACCORDING TO TORRIJOS, IT *AS THE SUPPORT GIVEN BY THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE LATIN AMERICAN FOREIGN MINISTERS, TOGETHER WITH THE DETERMINATION OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAD BROKEN THE DEADLOCK IN THE TALKS. HE ADDED, "THIS IS THE REASON FOR THE PRESENCE OF BUNKER AND KISSINGER."

4. NEWSPAPER COMMENTARY ON THE TREATY TALKS HAS APPEARED EACH DAY BUT HAS REMAINED LOW KEY, TENDING TO SPOOF THE MORE SPECTACULAR TREATMENT THE SUBJECT HAS BEEN RECEIVING IN U.S. NEWSPAPERS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE FRONTPAGE OF THE GOP-CONTROLLED MATUTINO J*NUARY 14 CONTAINED A COMMENTARY BY EFE CORRESPONDENT MARTINEZ DE VEGA INDICATING THAT U.S. PRESS COMMENTARY CONCERNING THE AGREEMENT WOULD LEAD UNINITIATED TO BELIEVE THAT THE TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED BY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS RADICALLY PUT AN END TO THE "COLONIAL SITUATION" THAT THE U.S. MAINTAINED IN THE CANAL ZONE. BUT UNFORTUNATELY THIS WAS NOT THE CASE AND THESE REPORTS HAD BEEN RECEIVED WITH A "GREAT DOSE OF INDIFFERENCE" BY PANAMANIAN WHO KNEW BETTER.

5. A CONSISTENT THEME IN ALL COMMENTARY HAS BEEN THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER HAS INSPIRED CONFIDENCE AND THAT THE FACT HE HAD COME TO PANAMA FOR THE FIRST TWO MEETINGS WITH PANAMANIAN LEADERS WAS CLEAR EVIDENCE OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF HIS PURPOSE AND OF CHANGE IN ATTITUDE BY U.S. OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. PREVIOUS U.S. NEGOTIATORS, ACCORDING TO THE COMMENTATORS, HAVE REMAINED ALOOF FROM PANAMA AND HAVE NEVER SHOWED AWARENESS OR INTEREST IN ITS PROBLEMS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PANAMA 00256 151839Z

6. COMMENT: TORRIJOS' COMMENTS ON THE TALKS WERE MADE DURING AN INTERVIEW WHICH FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON HIS FORTHCOMING TRIP TO ARGENTINA AND PERU. THEY WERE THE FIRST PUBLIC CONFIRMATION BY A PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON EIGHT POINTS. THE HANDLING BY TOP GOP OFFICIALS OF THE REPORTS ON THE TALKS WITH AMBASSADOR BUNKER AND THE EIGHT POINTS HAS ADROITLY CONVEYED AN AIR OF MILD OPTIMISM WHILE KEEPING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS FROM GROWING TO

UNMANAGEABLE PROPORTIONS. THE FREQUENT FAVORABLE REFERENCES IN THE NEWSPAPER COMMENTARIES TO THE FACT THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER HAD THE INTEREST AND "SERIOUSNESS OF PURPOSE" TO COME TO PANAMA TWICE DEMONSTRATES THE POSITIVE EFFECT OF SYMBOLIC GESTURES AND ACTIONS BY U.S. OFFICIALS. ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL OBSTACLES WE FACE IN NEGOTIATING WITH THE PANAMANIAN IS THEIR DEEPLY HELD CONVICTION THAT THE U.S. DURING THE PAST 70 YEARS HAS NEGLECTED TO CONSULT WITH PANAMA AND HAS FAILED TO RESPECT ITS NATIONAL DIGNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY. AS THE NEGOTIATIONS PROGRESS, THE PANAMANIAN CAN BE EXPECTED TO RESPOND FAVORABLY TO WORDS AND DEEDS BY U.S. OFFICIALS THAT SHOW SUCH RESPECT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY WILL BE SENSITIVE TO REAL OR IMAGINED SIGNS OF DISREGARD* BY THE U.S. FOR PANAMA. BY SYSTEMATICALLY DEMONSTRATING THAT THE U.S. DOES RESPECT PANAMA'S NATIONAL DIGNITY AND WILL CONSULT WITH PANAMA ON MATTERS AFFECTING THE CANAL, THE U.S. MAY BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE KIND OF NEGOTIATING ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS COULD ENGAGE IN GIVE AND TAKE COMPROMISE WHICH COULD LEAD TO SUCCESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. UNLESS SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT IS MAINTAINED, THE CHANCES FOR SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS WILL DIMINISH.

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